

TEAMS VS. GROUPS

This tool reminds people about the difference between teams and groups. When a group is mislabeled as a team, people may have unrealistic expectations of each other. On the other hand, if a group aspires to be a team, it is useful to know what behaviors are expected of team members. This tool is best used in conjunction with other tools in our Leadership Toolbox: “Five Habits of High Performing Teams,” “The Team Checklist,” and “Stages of Team Development.”

Here are three types of groups found in many organizations:

Type	Definition
Team	People who convene to achieve a well-understood purpose or mission; they have the necessary authority; they have clear measurements of progress; all members must work together to achieve the mission.
Work group	People who share a common purpose in coming together but whose focus is on achieving different missions. They do not need to work together as a team in order to achieve their missions. An example is people from different functional areas – sales and production, for instance – who come together to keep each other informed.
Management council	People who convene regularly to inform and advise. A group of leaders of independent subsidiaries, for example, who meet regularly to advise the CEO.

Here are the characteristics of teams vs. groups:

Team	Group
The team has a purpose, and every member knows what the purpose is.	The group has a purpose, and every member knows what the purpose is.
Each team member is vital to the team's success.	The group can succeed in a variety of ways; it is not so dependent on individual group members for success.
Each member makes a commitment to support the team and to do what's necessary to make the team successful.	Members may or may not make commitments to the group.
The team has defined rules of engagement, things team members have agreed to do to support the team.	The group may or may not have rules of engagement; if rules exist, they have less urgency and power than in a team.

Team	Group
When conflicts or surprises occur, team members think of the team first, and act accordingly. They communicate quickly, proactively, and straightforwardly.	When conflicts or surprises occur, members of the group may or may not think of the group first. They may have other groups or teams that are a higher priority for them.
The team regularly takes the pulse of team members and assesses whether it is succeeding in working together as a team.	The group rarely takes its pulse. Success for the group is less dependent on teamwork.
The team displays teamwork all the time. People know that tough issues will be brought to the team to hash out.	The group may display teamwork when dealing with a particular problem, but it is not consistent or expected.

It takes a lot more effort and communication to be a team. After reviewing the characteristics of groups versus teams, ask people to commit one way or the other. Remember, it's perfectly okay to decide to be a group, not a team. The important thing is to be honest with each other about the level of commitment you're willing to make – and not fall into the trap of pretending to be a team.